

Principles and Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue

Listening in Dialogue



**We are grateful to Scarborough Foreign Mission Society for
their generous sharing of these resources**

Contents

Nine Guidelines For Listening To Others	2
Compassionate Listening	3

Nine Guidelines for Listening to Others

These guidelines were developed by Kay Lindahl, the founder of the Listening Center in Laguna Niguel, California. Kay is also the chairperson of the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN). We include these guidelines here because listening is so vital to any form of dialogue, including interfaith dialogue. These guidelines are designed to facilitate healthy dialogue and deep listening and to create a safe space for meaningful conversation on all levels:

- 1. WHEN YOU ARE LISTENING, SUSPEND ASSUMPTIONS** – What we assume is often invisible to us. We assume that others have had the same experiences that we have, and that is how we listen to them. Learn to recognize assumptions by noticing when you get upset or annoyed by something someone else is saying. You may be making an assumption. Let it be – suspend it – and resume listening for understanding of the other.
- 2. WHEN YOU ARE SPEAKING, EXPRESS YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSE** – informed by your tradition, beliefs and practices as you have interpreted them in your life. Speak for yourself. Use “I” language. Take ownership of what you say. Speak from your heart. Notice how often the phrases “We all”, “of course”, “everyone says”, “you know”, come into your conversation. The only person you can truly speak for is yourself.
- 3. LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGMENT** – The purpose of dialogue is to come to an understanding of the other, not to determine whether they are good, bad, right or wrong. If you are sitting there thinking: ‘That’s good”, ‘That’s bad”, “I like that” “I don’t like that”, then you are having a conversation in your own mind, rather than listening to the speaker. Simply notice when you do this, and return to being present with the speaker.
- 4. SUSPEND STATUS** – Everyone is an equal partner in the inquiry. There is no seniority or hierarchy. All are colleagues with a mutual quest for insight and clarity. You are each an expert in your life. That is what you bring to the dialogue process.
- 5. HONOUR CONFIDENTIALITY** – Leave the names of participants in the room so if you share stories or ideas, no one’s identity will be revealed. Create a safe space for self-expression.
- 6. LISTEN FOR UNDERSTANDING, NOT TO AGREE WITH OR BELIEVE** – You do not have to agree with or believe anything that is said. Your job is to listen for understanding.
- 7. ASK CLARIFYING OR OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS** to assist your understanding and to explore assumptions.
- 8. HONOUR SILENCE AND TIME FOR REFLECTION** – Notice what wants to be said rather than what you want to say.
- 9. ONE PERSON SPEAKS AT A TIME** – Pay attention to the flow of the conversation. Notice what patterns emerge from the group. Make sure that each person has an opportunity to speak, while knowing that no one is required to speak.

Compassionate Listening

Some Assumptions

A First Step Toward Interfaith Dialogue

1. Compassionate Listening assumes that before authentic dialogue can occur, conflicting parties must first listen to each other. We cannot assume that we really know how it is to be another.
2. Compassionate Listening does not seek to change the other, but to love them. The more a person is loved, the more they are free to respond to inner truth.
3. Compassion Listening assumes that to build peace we need to acknowledge the humanity and the suffering of the other. Misunderstanding, conflicts, and violence are the result of unhealed wounds.
4. Compassionate Listening trusts that when people truly feel heard, they will be more open to hearing the stories of those with whom they disagree.
5. Compassionate Listening is a practice of reconciliation, and is thus based in the belief that mutual understanding and respect are the foundations for building communities across the borders of difference.

Excerpted from **Interfaith Peacemaking Curriculum** <http://abrahamicafaithspeacemaking.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/For-One-Great-Peace-Study-Guide.pdf>

Published by **Abrahamic Faiths Peacemaking Initiative** <http://abrahamicafaithspeacemaking.com>

Reprinted with permission.

